

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property

Historic name Shonkin Creek Bridge

Other names/site number Rattly Bridge/24CH0960

2. Location

street & number At about Milepost 21 on Shonkin Road ☐ not for publication

city of town Thirteen Miles West of Geraldine ☒ vicinity

State Montana code MT county Chouteau code 015 zip code n/a

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

 national statewide X local

Signature of certifying official

Date

Title

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official

Date

Title

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

 entered in the National Register

 determined eligible for the National Register

 determined not eligible for the National Register

 removed from the National Register

 other (explain:)

Shonkin Creek Bridge

Name of Property

Chouteau County, MT

County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

<input type="checkbox"/>	private
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - Federal
<input type="checkbox"/>	private

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box)

<input type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
		buildings
		sites
1		structures
		Objects
		buildings
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

Montana's Historic Steel Stringer and Steel Girder
Bridges, 1901-1961

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

TRANSPORTATION/Road-related (vehicular) =

Bridge

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

TRANSPORTATION/Road-related (vehicular) =

Bridge

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: Steel Stringer Bridge

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation: CONCRETE, METAL: steel

walls:

roof:

other: METAL: steel, WOOD: timber

Shonkin Creek Bridge

Name of Property

Chouteau County, MT

County and State

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

Summary Paragraph

The Shonkin Creek Bridge is located in the upper Shonkin Creek valley of central Montana. The bridge crosses Shonkin Creek just off Shonkin Road about sixteen miles southeast of Fort Benton and thirteen miles west of Geraldine in Chouteau County. The bridge is located within the Fort Union Formation, which formed about 65 million years ago during Cretaceous times and marks the vast coastal plains that once bordered an inland sea. The bridge is a three-span structure consisting of laced channel sections, angle sections and steel I-beam stringers with lattice-type guardrails. The bridge appears to have been cobbled together from parts of older steel bridges. Shonkin Creek, the stream crossed by the bridge, has cut its way down through the volcanic rock forming a narrow ravine. The area around the bridge is currently used for farming and cattle grazing.¹

Narrative Description

The Shonkin Creek Bridge is a three-span steel stringer structure resting on steel trestle-type bents. The bridge is currently closed to traffic. The bridge is 120 feet in length and 16 feet wide with a roadway width of 15.5 feet. The timber deck of the bridge is badly deteriorated and it is not recommended that pedestrians walk out onto the structure. The bridge spans a narrow ravine and it is located approximately fifty feet above the bed of Shonkin Creek. The substructure consists of two steel trestle-type bents. Each bent consists of two vertical laced channel sections with batten plates resting on top of two concrete footings. Horizontal laced channel sections span the footings at the bases of the verticals. The verticals support horizontal I-beam floor beams that, in turn, support the superstructure of the bridge. Paired diagonal angle section sway braces with batten plates connect the verticals on each bent. The east bent consists of one panel, while the taller west bent consists of two panels. The bridge ends rest on concrete abutments.

The superstructure of the bridge consists of eight lines of steel I-beam stringers resting atop the abutments and bents. The two outside stringers are slightly deeper than those under the deck and are chamfered at the bent connections. The timber deck is flanked by steel lattice-type guardrail panels bolted to angle section posts.

Integrity

Despite the fact that the bridge was bypassed in 1965 and has not been actively maintained since then, it retains a high degree of structural integrity. The bridge is a rare example of a simple steel stringer structure with steel trestle-type bents. The concrete footings are still intact as are the steel bents. The superstructure has not been modified or altered since its construction in the late 1920s. The deck is badly deteriorated, the result of no county maintenance since the mid-1960s.

¹ David Alt and Donald W. Hyndman, *Roadside Geology of Montana*, (Missoula: Mountain Press Publishing, 1986), 347.

Shonkin Creek Bridge

Name of Property

Chouteau County, MT

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- ☐ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply)

Property is:

- ☐ A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ B removed from its original location.
- ☐ C a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ D a cemetery.
- ☐ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ F a commemorative property.
- ☐ G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Engineering

Transportation

Period of Significance

1928-1961

Significant Dates

1928

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Chouteau County

Missouri River Lumber Co.

Period of Significance (justification)

The Period of Significance includes the year Chouteau County completed construction 1928 through the 50-year historic period. The bridge has been closed to traffic since at least 1965.

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

Shonkin Creek Bridge

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria)

The Shonkin Creek Bridge can be listed in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C. The bridge was completed in 1928 by Chouteau County and is likely composed of parts from at least one older steel bridge. The bridge was located on an important farm-to-market road in the county and facilitated the transportation of agricultural products and livestock to the Great Northern Railway's shipping facilities at Fort Benton. The bridge is also eligible as a unique steel stringer bridge. The steel trestle-type bents are a unique and adaptive feature that no other bridge remaining in Montana retains. Although the superstructure is an excellent example of a ubiquitous bridge type in rural Montana, the substructure is unique.

Narrative Statement of Significance (provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance)

The Shonkin Creek Bridge can be listed on the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C. The bridge is also an excellent example of a simple steel stringer structure. The bridge consists, simply, of seven lines of steel I-beam stringers placed atop timber abutments. The original components of the bridge are intact as are the original lattice-type guardrails and the unique steel trestle-type bents. The bridge retains excellent integrity and is a good example of the type of a steel I-beam stringer bridge built during the first two decades of the twentieth century.

Engineering Significance

The Shonkin Creek Bridge is a simple steel stringer structure that would be, on its own, structurally non-descript except for the lattice-type guardrail panels and the unique steel trestle-type bents. The bents are comprised of laced channel sections, batten plates, and angle section sway braces. As far as can be determined, this appears to be the only bridge in Montana with this type of substructure. The crossing at this location was not suitable to concrete or timber bents and the crossing too narrow for a pony truss structure. This bridge, therefore, displays a unique engineering feature not found elsewhere in the state.

Developmental history/additional historic context information (if appropriate)

The Shonkin Creek Bridge does not appear on the 1893 General Land Office map for this township. The unimproved road on the west side of Shonkin Creek, however, corresponds to the old road to Fort Benton. The road was also known as Nottingham Sawmill Road. H. A. Nottingham came to Montana in 1870 and worked as a rancher, trader, bullwhacker, woodhawk, and sawyer on the upper fork of Shonkin Creek. The road was in use by 1884 and officially surveyed in 1895. It was also known as the Fort Benton and Nottingham's Sawmill Road.²

In May 1927, the Chouteau County commissioners accepted a survey for Shonkin Creek Road and gave the approval for the construction of a bridge across the creek in the canyon about 21 miles south of Fort Benton. County crews would construct the bridge. Steel for the bridge arrived at the site in October 1927 when the county began work on the structure. By December of that year, work was mostly completed on the structure's concrete footings. The county authorized payment to the Missouri River Lumber Company of Fort Benton for the cement and the lumber for the footings of the bridge. Cold weather forced the project to shut down in January and February 1928. In early March, work resumed on the bridge when the county crews began erecting the steel. The county completed construction of the bridge in April 1928. The steel substructure of the bridge was fabricated by the Bethlehem Steel Company at its plant in Lakawanna, New York after 1922 (when the company acquired the Lakawanna Steel Company). The superstructure was fabricated at a steel plant in Illinois.³

The bridge remained in service on Shonkin Creek Road until the county bypassed it with a new alignment around 1965. Before that, however, according to Chouteau County Commission Jim O'Hara, it was the only bridge to survive the 1954

² General Land Office Map, March 1893; *Progressive Men of the State of Montana*, (Chicago: A. W. Bowen, 1902), 1080; Correspondence from Dennis Nottingham, July 2010.

³ County Commissioners' Proceedings: Chouteau County, Book 8, 178 (16 May 1927), 236 (4 October 1927), 257 (4 January 1928), 295 (6 March 1928), 307, 309 (4 April 1928).

Shonkin Creek Bridge

Name of Property

Chouteau County, MT

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flood that destroyed other bridges across the creek. The county abandoned the bridge and closed it to traffic in the late 1960s.⁴

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets)

Alt, David and Donald W. Hyndman. *Roadside Geology of Montana*. (Missoula: Mountain Press Publishing, 1986).

Axline, Jon. *Conveniences Sorely Needed: Montana's Historic Highway Bridges, 1860-1956*. (Helena: Montana Historical Society, 2005).

Chouteau County Commissioners' Proceedings, book 8 (7 June 1926 to 9 April 1930). Clerk and Records Office. Chouteau County Courthouse. Fort Benton, Montana.

Correspondence. Dennis Nottingham to Jon Axline, July 2010. On file at the Montana Department of Transportation. Helena, Montana.

E-mail from Jim O'Hara, Chouteau County Commissioner, to Jon Axline, 2009. On file at the Montana Department of Transportation. Helena, Montana.

General Land Office Map. Township 21 North, Range 9 East. Chouteau County, Montana. 23 March 1893. Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. Helena, Montana.

Progressive Men of the State of Montana. (Chicago: A. W. Bowen, 1902).

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been

requested

☐ previously listed in the National Register

☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register

designated a National Historic Landmark

☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____

☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

☐ State Historic Preservation Office

☒ Other State agency

☐ Federal agency

☐ Local government

☐ University

☐ Other

Name of repository: **Montana Department of Transportation**

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 0.5

(do not include previously listed resource acreage)

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1 12 533690 5267900
Zone Easting Northing

3 _____
Zone Easting Northing

2 _____
Zone Easting Northing

4 _____
Zone Easting Northing

Verbal Boundary Description (describe the boundaries of the property)

⁴ E-mail from Jim O'Hara, Chouteau County Commissioner, to author, 2009.

Shonkin Creek Bridge

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The boundary for the Shonkin Canyon Bridge is a rectangle measuring 110 x 16 feet. The rectangle encompasses the bridge and its approaches on both sides of the creek. The boundary is centered on the bridge.

Boundary Justification (explain why the boundaries were selected)

Boundaries for the Shonkin Canyon Bridge are drawn to encompass the three spans of the bridge, its immediate approaches and that portion of the creek spanned by the bridge. The width is increased beyond the measurements of the structure to include the piers and abutments.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jon Axline/Historian

organization Montana Department of Transportation

date 26 October 2010

street & number 2701 Prospect Avenue

Telephone (406) 444-6258

city or town Helena

state MT

zip code 59620-1001

e-mail jaxline@mt.gov

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive black and white photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

(See Continuation Sheets)

Property Owner:

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Chouteau County

street & number 1308 Franklin

Telephone 406-622-3631

city or town Fort Benton

state MT

zip code 5944-0459

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, PO Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Shonkin Creek Bridge

Name of Property

Chouteau, MT

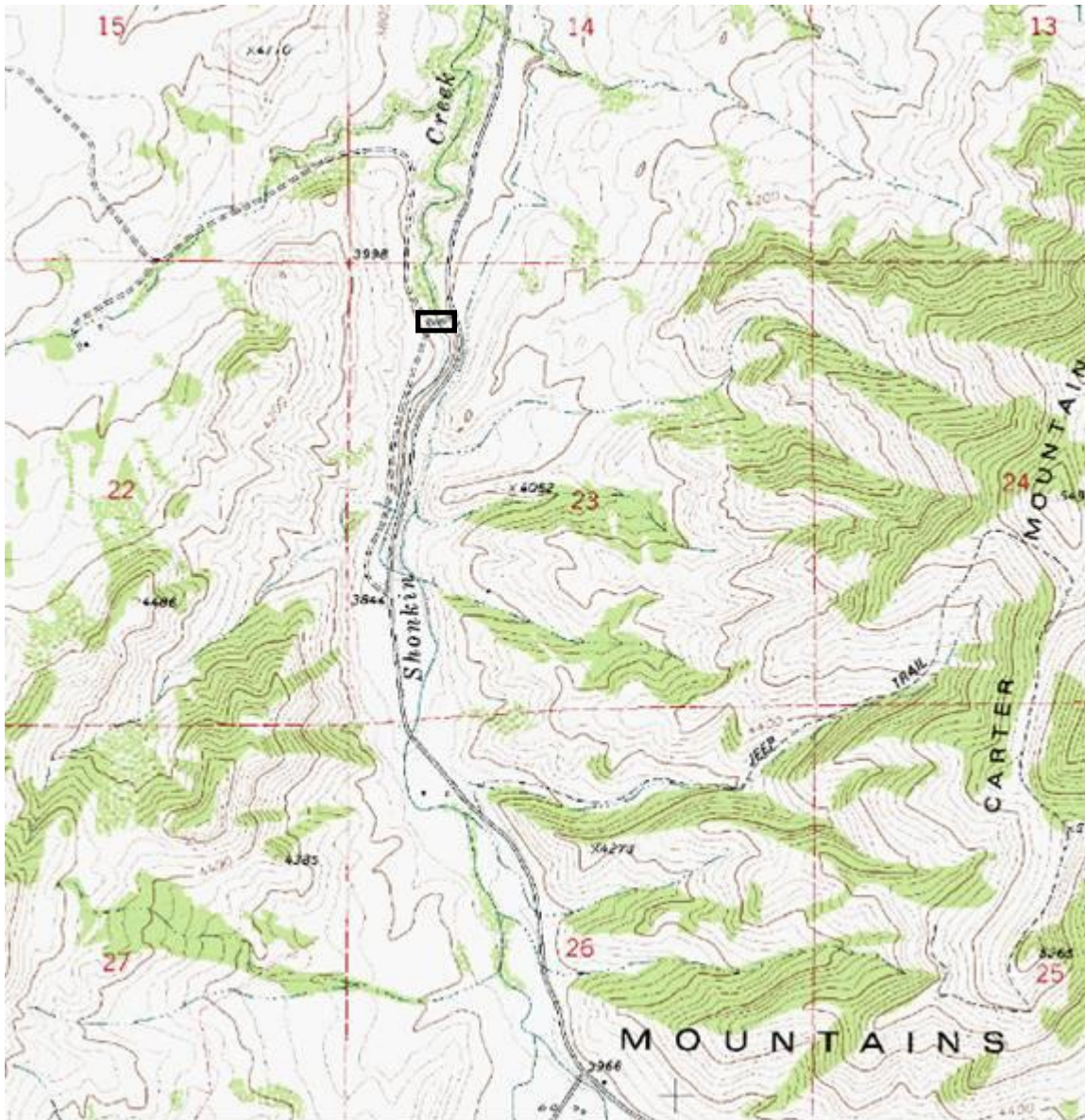
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Montana's Historic Steel Stringer and Steel
Girder Bridges, 1901-1961

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation

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Carter Mountain, Montana USGS Quadrangle Map, 1979

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Continuation Sheet**

Shonkin Creek Bridge

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Chouteau, MT

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Montana's Historic Steel Stringer and Steel
Girder Bridges, 1901-1961

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Photographs Page 9

Name: Shonkin Creek Bridge
County and State: Chouteau County, Montana
Photographer: Kristi Hager
Date of Photograph: 2005
Location of original negative: Montana Department of Transportation. Helena, Montana.
Description and view of camera: South profile. View to the north
Photograph: 0001

Name: Shonkin Creek Bridge
County and State: Chouteau County, Montana
Photographer: Kristi Hager
Date of Photograph: 2005
Location of original negative: Montana Department of Transportation. Helena, Montana.
Description and view of camera: South profile. View to the north
Photograph: 0002

Name: Shonkin Creek Bridge
County and State: Chouteau County, Montana
Photographer: Kristi Hager
Date of Photograph: 2005
Location of original negative: Montana Department of Transportation. Helena, Montana.
Description and view of camera: North profile. View to the southeast
Photograph: 0003

Name: Shonkin Creek Bridge
County and State: Chouteau County, Montana
Photographer: Kristi Hager
Date of Photograph: 2005
Location of original negative: Montana Department of Transportation. Helena, Montana.
Description and view of camera: South profile. View to the north
Photograph: 0004

Name: Shonkin Creek Bridge
County and State: Chouteau County, Montana
Photographer: Kristi Hager
Date of Photograph: 2005
Location of original negative: Montana Department of Transportation. Helena, Montana.
Description and view of camera: South profile. View to the northeast
Photograph: 0005

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Shonkin Creek Bridge

Name of Property

Chouteau, MT

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Montana's Historic Steel Stringer and Steel
Girder Bridges, 1901-1961

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Photographs Page 10



Photo 0001. Shonkin Creek Bridge. South profile. View to the north

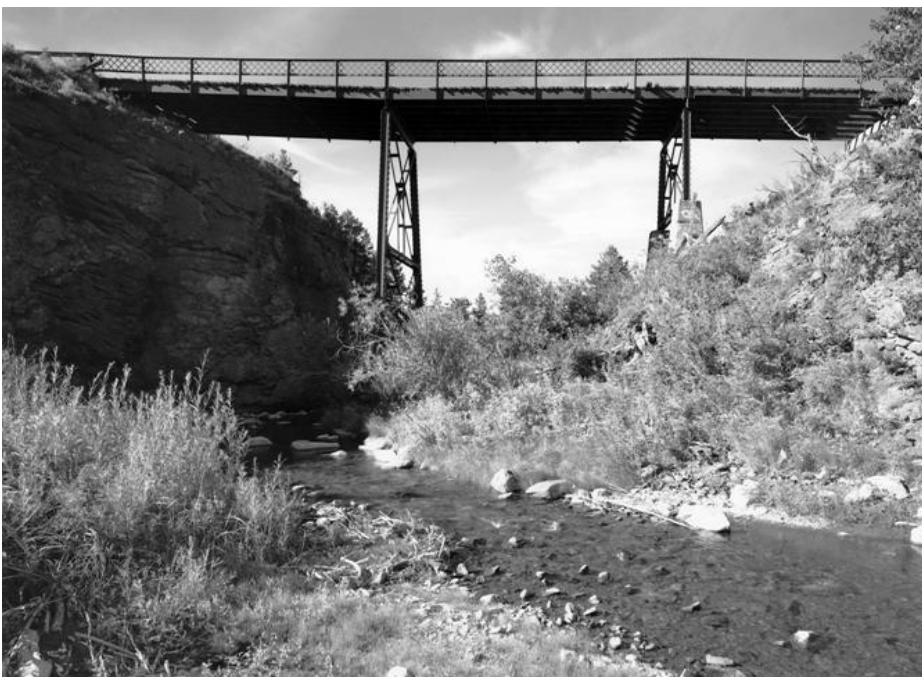


Photo 0002. Shonkin Creek Bridge. South profile. View to the north

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Photo 0003. Shonkin Creek Bridge. South profile. View to the north



Photo 0004. Shonkin Creek Bridge. South profile. View to the north.

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Section number Photographs Page 12

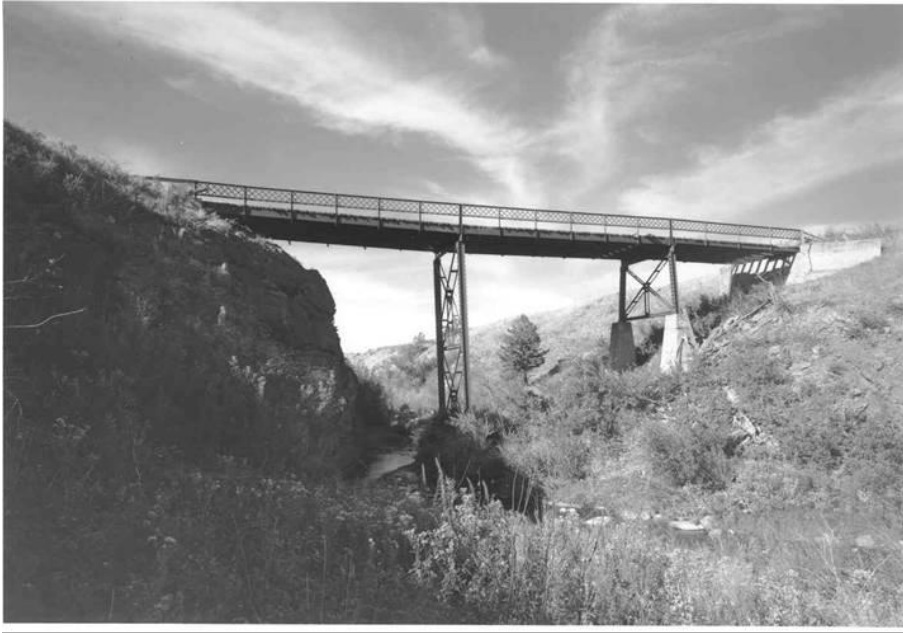


Photo 0005. Shonkin Creek Bridge. South profile. View to the northeast